

JOHN LOCKE'S THEORIES ON GOVERNMENT

To understand political power, we must consider the condition in which nature puts all men. It is a state of perfect freedom to do as they wish and dispose of themselves and their possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the laws of nature. They need not ask permission or the consent of any other man.

The state of nature is also a state of equality. No one has more power or authority than another. Since all human beings have the same advantages and the use of the same skills, they should be equal to each other. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it. Reason is the law. It teaches that all men are equal and independent, and that no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty, or possessions. All men are made by one all-powerful and wise Maker. They are all servants of one Master who sent them into the world to do His business. He has put men naturally into a state of independence, and they remain in it until they choose to become members of a political society.

Since men hope to preserve their property by establishing a government, they will not want that government to destroy this objective. When legislators (*lawmakers*) try to destroy or take away the property of the people, or try to reduce them to slavery, they put themselves into a state of war with the people who can then refuse to obey the laws. When legislators try to gain or give someone else absolute power over lives, liberties, and property of the people, they abuse the power which the people had put into their hands. It is then the privilege of the people to establish a new legislature to provide for their safety and security. These principles also hold true for the executive who helps to make laws and carry them out.

Perhaps some will say that the people are ignorant and discontented (*unhappy*) and that a government based on their unsteady opinion and uncertain humor will be unstable. They might argue that no government can exist for long if the people may set up a new legislature whenever they do not like the old one. But people do not easily give up their old forms of government. In England, for example, the unwillingness of the people to throw out their old constitution has kept us to, or brought us back to, our old legislature of king, lords, and commons.

However, it will be said that this philosophy may lead to frequent rebellion. To which I answer, such revolutions are not caused by every little mismanagement in public affairs. But if a long train of abuses, lies, and tricks make a government's bad intentions visible to the people, they cannot help seeing where they are going. It is no wonder that they will then rouse themselves, and try to put the rule into hands, which will secure to them the purpose for which government was originally organized.

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